Attachment E - Louisiana's Point Source Initiative

Presented by Dugan Sabins, Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality

One of components of the Hypoxia Action Plan is to examine point source contributions of nitrogen and phosphorus to the Mississippi River. Dugan Sabins' presentation focused on state programs used in Louisiana to achieve point source reductions. He highlighted Louisiana's Environmental Leadership Program (LAELP). This program came from a concept that grew among the states and EPA. In Louisiana, the program receives EPA funding and a state agency covers overhead costs. The Louisiana director works directly in partnership with point source dischargers across the state.

This program was used to highlight the emerging problem of hypoxia in the Gulf of Mexico and its relationship to nutrients discharged into the Mississippi River, as well as the emerging requirement to develop nutrient criteria. Mr. Sabins noted that the sooner point source dischargers are informed of impending new regulations, the better chance they have to prepare their processes to meet them. The Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) wanted to let dischargers know about nutrient criteria and elicit their support. Through the program, DEQ also wanted to exchange information and data helpful to developing criteria that both are protective of the environment while being considerate of the economic issues facing point source dischargers.

The LAELP has strong support at all echelons of state government, including Governor Mike Foster and DEQ Secretary Dale Givens. The program, which began in 1995, now includes 80 participants and is continuing to increase. Federal, municipal, parish, and large industrial facilities are enrolled. Major entities with partnerships include EPA Region 6, Mid-Continent Oil and Gas Association, Louisiana Chemical Association, and Pulp and Paper Association. Successful results depend on these memberships. The partners fill out forms indicating their interests. They must adhere to four points:

1. Minimize impact on human health and environment as top priority.
2. Have an internal environmental management system to encourage continuous improvements in performance.
3. Use waste management hierarchies, source reduction, recycling, treatment and disposal, wherever possible.
4. Be proactive in communicating with neighbors and the community regarding environmental matters.

Prospective partners prepare a plan that incorporates these four items, which gets them into the program. The Secretary of DEQ formally acknowledges their participation with a letter and a certificate. Partners can participate in conferences and seminars organized by the LAELP to explore pollution prevention opportunities and environmental management issues. Other benefits of joining include being recognized by their neighbors as companies committed to improving environmental quality. A key attention-getting facet of the program is that participants are allowed to compete for the annual Governor's Award for outstanding achievement in pollution prevention. Volunteers help run and maintain the program. In an average year industries submit 20 to 30 projects, from which 7 or 8 are selected to receive awards given at the state capital.

Big players in the industrial complex include Fortune 500 companies, three-quarters of which are located on the Mississippi River. They are permitted dischargers to the river, and therefore it is logical to use this program in conjunction with the Hypoxia Program and its nutrient issues.

In 1999 a special category for nutrient reduction was introduced. Industries saw it as another part of their environmental management. Point source dischargers had been focused on preventing ammonia discharges but had continued to discharge the breakdown product, nitrogen, into the river. Often, nitrogen was not considered problematic.

BASF Corporation submitted a project that would modify its wastewater treatment plant to include a new biological process to convert 2.3 million pounds annually from nitrates in the water into atmospheric nitrogen, reducing nitrogen loading into the Gulf of Mexico. BASF is willing to transfer this technology to other industries and to municipalities.

IMC AgriCo conducted an exceptional environmental project in the early 1990s before the current economic downturn. They covered their huge gypsum stacks at a cost of more than $27 million and reduced phosphoric acid discharges to the river bu over 80 percent. Despite the fact that phosphoric acid was delisted as part of the Toxic Release Inventory, IMC Agrico voluntarily agreed to include their reductions in its solid waste and water discharge permits.

Working under LAELP, the advisory group to LAELP compiled a report for voluntary reductions of nitrogen and phosphorus compounds. In spite of major growth, the industries used voluntary reductions and self-monitoring to reduce releases of ammonia, phosphorus and nitrogen, and acids to the river. They continue to be committed to this effort. Concentrations of nitrogen and phosphorus in the Mississippi are the same going into the Gulf downstream of these industries as they are through the corridor of these areas, according to water quality testing. Further information about LALEP can be found on their website at: www.deq.state.la.us/assistance.